

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Eleanor Aoki Kirito

Eleanor Aoki Kirito, eldest among five children, was born in 1929 in Hilo, Hawai'i, to Tamotsu and Mitsuko Aoki. Her parents were both nisei, born in Hawai'i; but her father was a *kibei*, educated in Kumamoto-*ken*, Japan.

Tamotsu Aoki was a prominent member of the local community; he was active in the Japanese section of the Mormon Church. He was a member of the Kumamoto Prefectural Association. He was a practitioner of Japanese martial arts. He was a respected businessman—manager of American Savings and Loan.

He entertained many, including visiting Japanese naval officers.

With the outbreak of war, many prominent in the Japanese community of Hawai'i Island were incarcerated. In February 1942, Tamotsu Aoki was removed from his home, detained at Kīlauea Military Camp, and later moved to Sand Island Detention Center.

He was released from Sand Island in December 1942 to be relocated with his family and elderly parents to the U.S. Mainland. Had the family not agreed to the relocation, Tamotsu Aoki would not have been released from Sand Island.

The Aokis were transported to Jerome War Relocation Center, Arkansas where they remained for about a year and a half. They were then placed in the Gila River War Relocation Center, Arizona for the duration of the war.

Released and returned to the islands, the family was again on the Big Island of Hawai'i.

The home they returned to was without furnishings. They slowly refurnished it. Tamotsu Aoki, initially without a car of his own, resumed his work at the savings and loan.

Eleanor resumed her studies, graduating from Hilo High School. Now living on O'ahu, she is the mother of three, grandmother of seven, and great-grandmother of one.

Tape No. 57-13-1-12
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Eleanor Aoki Kirito (EK)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

October 18, 2012

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MK: This is an interview with Eleanor Kirito. This is session one. It’s October 18, 2012. We’re doing the interview in Mānoa, Honolulu, O‘ahu. The interviewers are Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

Mrs. Kirito, first of all thank you for saying yes.

EK: Yes. (Laughs)

MK: We’ll start off with easy questions first.

EK: Okay.

MK: First of all, what year were you born?

EK: Nineteen twenty-nine.

MK: And where were you born?

EK: In Hilo, Hawai‘i.

MK: What was your mother’s name?

EK: Mitsuko Kimura.

MK: Okay. And your father’s name?

EK: Tamotsu Aoki.

MK: Okay. Now, where was your mother born?

EK: She was born on Kaua‘i.

MK: What were you told about your mother’s family?

EK: Well, those days—actually her father went to Ni‘ihau and he was a carpenter in Ni‘ihau. Not too many people allowed there by the Robinson family.

MK: Where did she spend her childhood?

EK: Honolulu. They moved to Honolulu.

MK: Your father, where was he born?

- EK: He was born in Pāhala. Ka'ū.
- MK: What have you been told about your father's parents?
- EK: My father's parents came from Japan and then went to Big Island, in the plantation.
- MK: What kind of work did they do on the plantation?
- EK: My grandfather used to take care of the reservoir. You know, there was just one home way in the mountain, and you can go in there by horseback only. No roads. He used to open the water. They had flumes for the cane, so it flowed down so that they could mill [the sugarcane]. He used to control that water. (They also had some cane lands. During the summer I remember helping planting cane.)
- MK: I remember when we spoke with your brother, Albert, he mentioned that your grandfather was a *luna*?
- EK: Yes, I guess those days they call them *luna*, (especially if you have cane land workers).
- MK: How many children did your grandfather and grandmother Aoki have?
- EK: Two. Two boys.
- MK: Your father, Tamotsu, what do you know about his growing-up years on the Big Island?
- EK: What I heard was he went to school (until) about fourth grade. Then he was sent to Japan. So he was educated in Japan until he graduated school there.
- WN: What part of Japan did he go to?
- EK: Kumamoto, Japan.
- WN: So that's where your grandfather is from? Kumamoto-*ken*?
- EK: My grandmother and grandfather are from Kumamoto.
- MK: How about your mother's side? Where did they come from?
- EK: Also from Kumamoto.
- MK: So both sides Kumamoto-*ken*?
- EK: Uh-huh [yes].
- MK: Your dad, Tamotsu Aoki, he was born in Hawai'i, but he was sent to Japan. For what purpose was he sent to Japan?
- EK: Actually, sent there for schooling.
- MK: Oh, okay. How many years was he there?
- EK: Until he graduated.
- MK: So, all of his education practically . . .
- EK: Was in Japan.
- MK: In Japan. When your father came—when did your father come back?

EK: I don't know what year but after he finished school.

MK: So when he came back, what did he do?

EK: He was a car salesman. Later, he was manager for American Savings and Loan. That was in 1929, I think. That's the year I was born.

MK: And you know, your father having been born in the islands, having spent part of his youth in the islands and then being educated in Japan, how was he in English and Japanese?

EK: He was strong in Japanese, so I really didn't know English because (my parents) spoke more Japanese. When I started kindergarten, I had difficulties so I used to go to school, tagged every day back-and-forth. My mom would (send me) with a note, the teacher (would do the same). I used to have it pinned on in my clothes.

(Laughter)

So then, when my brother was born, (my mom decided) she's going to start speaking English. (My mom's) parents were aliens, so she was strong in Japanese too.

MK: I see. By the time you were born, your father was manager?

EK: Yes, I think that's the year he started.

MK: Oh American Savings?

EK: It was another—they changed the name so I don't remember it anymore but it was a savings and loan.

MK: And your mother, what was her main responsibility?

EK: Oh, she was just a housewife.

MK: Housewife? Okay. Because your dad was with American Savings, how active was he in the community? You know when you were a child, what do you remember?

EK: Actually there isn't really much, but my dad use to entertain a lot. All these Japanese naval ships used to come and he used to entertain them. That's why he was taken in because he used to write a diary every day, and it was all written in Japanese. Every time the boats would come he'll take us along and then he'll bring the officers home. Have them go in the *furo* and then dinner and take them back to the ship. (He also was active in politics. Election day, he made me check the voting list and I had to go pick up voters at their homes.)

MK: Was he also doing anything for the Japanese consulate?

EK: Not that I really know. But he used to do a lot of entertainment.

MK: Entertaining the visiting naval ships.

EK: Naval, yes.

MK: In speaking with your brother, it seems like your father and grandfather were both very active in martial arts.

EK: Oh yes. My grandfather was a real sumo [wrestler]. He used to have me do sumo in the (living room). (Chuckles) We used to put the string (and make a circle) and then (begin the) real sumo.

(Laughter)

- WN: Yeah, did they teach you folks techniques?
- EK: Techniques, yes. You know you have to do that motion with your feet and everything. I tell you I'm being the girl but had two brothers below me.
- MK: So your grandfather was having you do sumo. (Chuckles)
- EK: Sumo, yes.
- WN: Wow.
- MK: How about judo?
- EK: Judo was later. Yes. My father brought in an instructor from Japan (to teach women). I (joined) two nurses and bank tellers for self-defense (training). (We had) about twenty-four of us that took up judo—trained by that Japanese [instructor]. My brother (Albert) was involved also. He's still involved in judo and has his own *dōjō*.
- MK: When Albert and you were children though, was your father involved with judo?
- EK: Judo. Yes.
- MK: Any other martial arts they were involved in like sumo? Judo?
- EK: That's about it. I know my father wanted me to take *kendō*, because this (one) family, (their daughter) was real good.
- MK: You know, with your parents being from Kumamoto-*ken*—both sides—how active was the family with say Kumamoto *kenjinkai* [prefectural association]?
- EK: My father was active in Kumamoto *kenjinkai*.
- MK: What do you remember about any activities that the *kenjinkai* sponsored?
- EK: Actually, only picnics I remember.
- MK: In those days how were the picnics?
- EK: Games and races.
- MK: Did your mother help prepare the foods and everything?
- EK: Well, those days everybody used to bring their own food, but they would have concessions and other things, like shave ice, etc.
- MK: When it came to things like religion, what religion did your family follow?
- EK: Buddhist.
- MK: How many children were in your family?
- EK: (Six) of us. (We lost a sister only a month old.)
- MK: So, what were their names?
- EK: Brother right below me was Stanley. Then Albert. A sister, Mildred. The youngest was Amy. (My brother Stanley passed away at age 29 from cancer. Amy passed away at age 67 from cancer, too.)

- MK: You mentioned that you were born in Hilo. Where was your family house located?
- EK: I remember, early part it was on Ululani Street. Then we lived on Kapi‘olani Street for most of the time. Then, we moved up to Kaūmana. That was our last home.
- MK: So, right before the war which area were you folks living in?
- EK: On Kaūmana.
- MK: Kaūmana. Try describe for us what your Kaūmana house looked like.
- EK: It’s a very old home. It’s still there. In fact, Albert is going there and do some repairs so he can rent it. It’s been vacant.
- MK: How many bedrooms did it have?
- EK: Three bedrooms and another bedroom downstairs.
- MK: Was it a home that the family owned?
- EK: Yes.
- MK: When you look back to the Kaūmana house when you were growing up, what was the neighborhood like?
- EK: We had a nice neighborhood.
- MK: Who lived there in the neighborhood?
- EK: Actually, our neighbors was one family. They’re Chinese-Hawaiian but I guess those days the parents must have owned all the property, so the (two) sons and (one) daughter were (adjoining) neighbors. (We also had many Japanese neighbors too.)
- MK: That Kaūmana area, how would you describe it?
- EK: It’s just about a mile from town. It was one street above the Hilo county jail.
- MK: Were there businesses nearby or. . . .
- EK: No. There was a reservoir on the same street. On the (opposite end) where we lived.
- MK: So, if you folks needed anything, you’d have to go to Hilo?
- EK: In town.
- MK: To town.
- EK: Oh no, there was a little mama-*san* store. They were very nice during the war. It was owned by a Japanese lady and she would tell us to come to the back door to get things like sugar and rice.
- MK: Oh, they were rationed.
- EK: Rationed. Yes.
- MK: You mentioned that you folks were Buddhist. What Buddhist temple did you folks go to?

EK: Actually, I didn't go. It was Hilo Hongwanji [Mission] where (funerals were held). Earlier part before the war, we went to the Mormon church. They had a Japanese section, and they made my father president.

(Laughter)

We used to go to the Mormon church (on Kūkūau Street). They had elders come from Utah all the time, all in pairs. They leave home with only forty dollars to live on. So they do not ride buses. They walk. Always walk. They have to live on that forty dollars. (Their) parents sent them (money) those days. (They dropped by) and we got to know them (well) and they used to come and help my dad with the yard work and (chores). He would let them (take) *furo* and they even have pictures taken in his kimono and (*haori*). (They will) have dinner (and when) he wants to take them back to the quarters, they said they'll walk. He let them walk, but then my dad (will) go and pick them up (on the way) and take them home.

They had sisters also, too. There was this *haole* sister. I still remember her name Sister Backstead. And Japanese Sister Terazawa. They used to come over quite often. In fact, Sister Backstead got really sick and she stayed with us—my mom took care of her. But then, the war (started). Everything (changed).

MK: You know, for Japanese at that time in the islands, to be Mormon is a little different.

EK: Yes. We had quite a bit of people.

MK: Yeah. And so your family was more active in the Mormon church.

EK: We used to go to Mormon church. Hongwanji was just family services.

MK: Then, when you folks were kids, to what extent were you active in like YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] or YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] or settlement house activities or anything like that?

EK: Actually, not much.

MK: So, for your activities was it more family-related or Mormon church-related or. . .

EK: It's more family-related.

MK: I was just curious, because there were five kids, what did you folks do for fun?

EK: Actually, we had a pretty big yard, so weekends the neighbor kids would come and we would have baseball in our yard. (MK chuckles.) Then from November to February my father used to like hunting—pheasant hunting. So, he would drag us to Waimea. He had a dog, and this dog was smart. Pointers. When they see a pheasant, they will stop and their tail (points out and) they won't move. So you know there is a pheasant there. We used to walk (in the) tall grass. When he (shot the) pheasant, (with) his twelve-gauge gun (it) has (many) tiny bullets. You have to (pick) it out of their flesh. People used to make hat (band) *leis*.

MK: Hat *leis*.

EK: We used to dry (it after skinning) and people used to buy (it).

MK: It was your job to help?

EK: Cleaning that thing. Yes. (MK chuckles.) Then they have a little smell, so we used to soak it in salt water. I used to dread that. (MK laughs.)

MK: Did your father go hunting for other game too?

EK: No, just pheasant.

MK: How about going fishing?

EK: Oh yes. Fishing. They used to go all the way to South Point, fishing. That's the morning the war started.

MK: Oh, okay. So fishing, hunting, those are things that your dad would like to do.

EK: My dad would do. Yes.

WN: Would you go with him? To hunting?

EK: A couple of times (I tagged) along.

(Laughter)

MK: How about fishing?

EK: Yes, fishing I went a couple times. In fact, one day I wanted to go so badly on the boat I went fishing. But, going is okay. The minute the boat anchors, I get so sick and I can't fish. Those days, you don't need any bait. One line you have about three or four hooks and what he does is mix in some (moist) bread and some (other things and release it slowly from a bag).

WN: Oh, chum.

EK: Release that. So the fish would just bite. I pulled up—I have like three fishes on one line. I couldn't do anything really. (MK and WN chuckle.) I was so sick. I never went back fishing after that.

WN: What kind of boat did he have?

EK: A regular. You know . . .

WN: With a motor?

EK: Yes, yes.

MK: So your family was pretty outdoors-like.

EK: Yes. Yes in a way.

MK: You know, being the eldest daughter, did your mother have you do like a little bit more traditional girl-like things like sewing or cooking or any of those?

EK: Yes. Cooking. I had to be there and not to watch, but actually you have to do it, (and get involved. I also went to sewing school.)

MK: And your mom was entertaining so would you be helping in the kitchen on those days?

EK: Yes. Helping. When it comes to dinner, my father was good at (cooking) chicken *hekka*. Sukiyaki (only). It was done on the *hibachi*. Not electric. And he was very good at that.

MK: And it was your dad who did it, not your mom.

EK: That's the only thing he can do. Nothing else. He was good in (cooking the) *hekka*. Everybody (would say) how come when they do it (they have) no sauce—but when my dad does there's a lot of sauce.

- MK: For making the chicken *hekka* you've got chicken and vegetables.
- EK: Oh, and tofu, too.
- MK: Where were you folks getting your chicken and the produce?
- EK: My mom in fact raised some hen for eggs. My sister was good. Instead of cutting the neck they do something with the beak and kill the chicken. We had to put it in hot water and defeather in those days.
- MK: How about a vegetable garden or anything near your home?
- EK: Hardly any vegetables. She used to raise flowers and vanda [orchids]. Those days, one flower was pretty good money. Now you don't see too much of that vanda [orchids]. Before it was like two cents a flower but then it came to around four or five cents a flower.
- MK: So your mom used to raise vanda [orchids] to sell?
- EK: Sell, yes.
- MK: So your mom did more than housewife work.
- EK: Yes.
- MK: Earlier you mentioned that you're the eldest of five yeah? I was wondering what responsibilities or chores you had in the family.
- EK: Well actually, responsibility-wise it wasn't too much but anything like cooking I have to not only watch but do it. My mom was so particular that while you cook you have all the pots and pans. You cannot pile it. As you cook you have to wash it and she wants everything clean. She was so particular. (My dad's house slipper had to be ready when he returns from work. I had to clean the bathroom basin every morning before my dad shaves.)
- MK: How about watching your younger siblings? Who did that?
- EK: Oh, I remember. I don't know how old I was then but one year when we lived on Kapi'olani Street there was a Japanese cemetery right in the back. *Obon* people had come and put up *chochin*. I had my brother Albert on my back, watching him. I dropped him. He had a big *tankobu*.
- WN: Right on his head.
- EK: Right on his forehead. I still remember that. He was pretty young and I must have been about eight, nine years old. (EK and MK laugh.)
- WN: Did you do that a lot? Carrying your siblings on your back?
- EK: My back, yes. Later on, with the *obi*, you know the big wide *obi*, tied in the back (and around your waist). I was seven years old and at that time my mom was doing some gardening. She was having a little hard time too and she taught me how to cook. The first thing I cooked was watercress and string beans. My grandfather visited from Pāhala and came over and she was in the garden and she made me cook for my grandfather. So my grandfather (always) remembered that. That's the only two that I learned how to do. (WN and MK chuckle) But I used to be afraid of the gas stove because nowadays it's pilot. You have to (use) match and the thing makes a huge (puff) noise. I used to be afraid to light the stove.
- MK: So at age seven, you could cook. You could cook at least one dish.

- EK: Yes. (MK and EK laugh.)
- WN: You know when your father was entertaining the naval officers, did you help at all?
- EK: Well, preparation-wise (and warming up the sake), but once everything is done he did everything.
- WN: I guess that was a special time when they would come. Like a special kind of food or. . .
- EK: Yes. It's more drinks though, but he (cooked the) chicken *hekka*. My mom would prepare (other dishes).
- MK: You mentioned that you folks were members of the Mormon church. Your father became president. I was wondering, what kind of activities did they have for you folks?
- EK: Actually, Tuesday night they call—was it MIA [Mutual Improvement Association] or I forgot they had a name for it. That's when you go and then they play—they have games and basketball and stuff. Because Sunday is church.
- MK: When it came to schooling, what schools did you go to?
- EK: I went to Hilo Union and Hilo Intermediate. Then, the last year was Hilo High.
- MK: When it came to Japanese-language training, were you sent to Japanese-language school?
- EK: Yes. I went until the war. To fourth grade Japanese school.
- MK: Where did you go for Japanese school?
- EK: Hilo Dokuritsu Gakkō.
- MK: What are your thoughts on the years you spent at Japanese-language school?
- EK: Actually, I remember this one teacher. Mr. Shishido. I liked that teacher because there was a Mr. [Otokichi Muin] Ozaki. He was very strict. People used to be afraid of him.
- MK: But this other teacher. . .
- EK: Mr. Shishido, he was good.
- MK: How were you in Japanese?
- EK: It's okay. It was all right. Nothing special. (EK and MK laugh.)
- MK: I thought I'd ask because when you went to kindergarten you were more . . .
- EK: Japanese.
- MK: Japanese-speaking. I wonder what happened in the in-between years.
- EK: Because once I started first grade I was able to converse.
- MK: At this---your public school experience, what did you enjoy most about going to school?
- EK: Actually, meeting friends and then the teachers. The teacher was real good at Hilo Union School. Miss [R.] Bohnenberg. And there was Miss [Annie] Napier. Miss Bohnenberg actually—when we evacuated we were on the ship, she sent a message. She was so nice. She was German and she was a real good principal.

MK: Would you remember what kind of message she sent?

EK: I really don't know the exact words.

MK: A lot of people maybe wouldn't do something . . .

EK: Something. (I think they were more afraid.)

MK: . . . like that.

WN: The message was sympathetic toward you folks going to the camp.

EK: Going. Because there was a whole bunch I think. Not only our family.

MK: What grade were you when you left the Big Island for camp?

EK: Eighth grade.

MK: About eighth grade. (Pause) Now, when war started December 7, 1941, tell us what happened to your parents. I think you have a story from your diary about that day.

EK: Yes, that day. In fact, we had a bazaar at the Japanese-language school. School bazaar. We were there and I was helping with the making of cone sushi. Then they said that war started, and we did not really understand. So they just had to close up and then everybody went home. We had blackout those days. You don't have shades in the house, so with newspaper we covered the windows. After a certain time you can't have any light.

February 22nd—I still remember it was Presidents' Day—my father's parents lived in Pāhala so he went to visit them because his friends were already being taken in (by the military police). He says it's going to be his turn. So we visited them. In those days we had two sisters from Kohala staying with us. My father sent one to Hilo High, (the other) wanted to be a barber so my father (owned) a barber [shop] so she was trained there. The two girls were home. When we came home the house was already torn apart. They went through all the drawers and everything. Everything written in Japanese was taken and his daily diary was taken. They came back for my father later and they gave him enough time for my mom to pack him a suitcase. They took him to Volcano for a while before he was sent to Sand Island [Detention Center] (in Honolulu).

WN: Was that KMC [Kīlauea Military Camp]?

EK: Yes.

WN: And Volcano. KMC.

EK: Same.

MK: Backing up a little bit, you mentioned that December 7 you were at the bazaar helping making *inari* sushi. On that day, where were your parents?

EK: I think my father was still around at the school (and my mom was also helping in the kitchen).

MK: When you were told that war started, what did you think? As young as you were, what did you think on December 7?

EK: Gosh. I was kind of worried too because right where we lived there was a huge mountain. Above Hāla'i Hill there was another mountain. They already had cannons placed there. So, December—I don't know if it was on the 7th, they shot the cannons so our house shook. They saw a submarine rising in the ocean so they shot from that mountain. I was

- really scared. You can see the cannons on this mountain. They were prepared, actually. They knew there was going to be a war, otherwise it wouldn't be there December 7.
- MK: Knowing that the cannons are there and not that far from your own home, you could. . . .
- EK: And then, not only that—eruption, there was eruption. Lava flow. So that was coming down. We live in Kaūmana. It came down to about six miles above. I heard they had to drop a bomb to stop (the flow). (It was blackout but the lava flow lighted up the sky so the enemy will be able to see everything.)
- WN: So the lava was flowing during December 7th?
- EK: I don't think it was on the 7th but it was (around that time).
- WN: Oh yeah. And there were—was that Halema'uma'u where they dropped the . . .
- EK: The bomb (was dropped near the Saddle Road coming down Kaūmana area about six miles).
- WN: . . . bombs inside the crater.
- EK: No, to stop it because if you drive up you can see the flow about six miles above Kaūmana. It came down pretty far. So they had to bomb that. You cannot hide, it's all lighted. (WN and EK laugh.)
- WN: Boy, a lot going on at that time yeah. (Laughs)
- EK: Yes.
- MK: Yeah. My goodness. So, how did your parents react right after Pearl Harbor? How did they react to that? Especially with your father being *kibei* and entertaining Japanese naval officers.
- EK: Well, nothing you can do. One by one, he hear people taken in. He was just waiting for his time. So, February 22nd is—I still remember the date.
- MK: What do you remember of the time they actually came to take your dad?
- EK: Actually, I don't recall too much, but MPs [military police] took him. There was a detective—a Portuguese detective—lived a couple houses from us. He knew that my father was going to be taken out from Volcano and going to be shipped to Sand Island. So, he told my mom to take us to Kalākaua Park. Just sit by the stone wall because my father will be questioned in the federal building and he's going to take him. (We could not) talk or anything. We sat down just to see him. He [the detective] was nice enough to tell us to sit at the stone wall so we can see my dad before he's being shipped to Honolulu.
- MK: Would you know if your mom had any word about your father or from your father during the time he was held on the Big Island? Any communication?
- EK: No. (Nothing.)
- MK: I was thinking, with your father being taken, how did people in the community react or act towards your family?
- EK: People were afraid. Friends. Because you don't have a job. You don't have anything. They stay away from you because they think you're going to ask for money I guess. So you know who really friends are. We had to go on welfare because my mom was not working and we had my grandparents, plus we had these two girls staying with us. We had nine of us in the family.

MK: That was—that's a big change yeah?

EK: Then, you had to dig caves [bomb shelters]. Shelter. Our property was all stone. You cannot dig. We built with stones, I think it was about three-feet wide, all stone wall. Then, for the roof, sand. We put some food and canned goods in case we had to evacuate. People used to dig into their ground but we couldn't do that.

MK: You mentioned that your grandmother and grandfather had come from Pāhala.

EK: Pāhala. And stayed with us already since my father was taken.

MK: So they came to help out while your father was taken?

EK: They came to live with us already.

MK: So your father was taken on February 22nd, 1942. Later on, I guess you folks were notified that you folks would be going to the Mainland?

EK: Yes, the only way that he can leave Sand Island is the family to move. They gave us just two weeks to pack.

MK: If you folks had said, if your mom had said, "Oh no, we don't want to go. I don't want to move my kids to the Mainland," your father would not have been . . .

EK: Released. Yes.

MK: Released?

EK: Yes. So, we decided to go. That's the only way he can be released. He wasn't feeling well too. He was turning all yellow. Not enough vegetables. Sand Island those days didn't have the bridge. You have to pay ten cents or twenty cents with a boat to Sand Island. My mom from the Big Island would take head cabbage and Chinese cabbage to visit him on Sand Island. At first (chance) he'd just break off the leaf and just (ate) it like that.

MK: How much contact did she have with your father while he was at Sand Island?

EK: No contact really. Only times when she visited him. (She wrote letters and I also wrote letters.)

MK: How often did she go to visit?

EK: I think only once.

MK: Yeah, to go from the Big Island to go to O'ahu and do that. Did she still have family on O'ahu?

EK: Yes. Her parents and her sister.

MK: Were they able to help out in any way?

EK: Yes. They tried to help.

MK: Were the kids ever able to visit Father at Sand Island?

EK: No, only my mom.

MK: You were saying that you were given only two weeks to get ready. What did you folks do to get ready?

EK: My grandparents—in Japan they call it *wataire*. They stuff it with cotton to make it thick. My grandmother rushed and then I think she made two with their old kimono. I remember, it was real thick (and bulky). I remember she was rushing to do that. My mom had to sell her car—in those days you cannot buy cars so people wanted the car. She sold—the car was still kind of new yet—for \$250. People wanted to buy the refrigerator, washing machine, just for nothing. Since we're leaving, my mom needed the cash too, so she sold all of that. The house was all vacant. At least she had time to have Bishop Trust take care of the rent. (WN coughs.) [Words unclear.]

MK: You mentioned that your father was with American Savings. Whatever funds that were with American Savings, were they available to you folks? Or not available?

EK: Later on. Actually, I don't remember what happened after that. They took over and I don't think they closed office. I don't remember what they did with. . . .

MK: Seems like maybe the funds were not available. You folks had to go on welfare to manage. I'm wondering in either case, really hard time.

When you folks were ready to go, how were you folks transported? Do you know (pause) to the wharf or from your house?

EK: You know something, I don't remember.

MK: How about from the Big Island to O'ahu? What do you remember?

EK: We were on this ship. *Hualālai* or something from Hilo to Honolulu (on Christmas Eve). We got to Honolulu (on Christmas Day and) they took us straight to immigration station. The beds were double-deck beds. December 27th we left the immigration station and got on the *Lurline*. It was the last ship—the last before they dry docked. This was a passenger ship. But then you get on the ship—the beds all double deck, but canvas. You can read all these (scribbles) the military boys did.

MK: When did you finally get to be with your father?

EK: On the 27th of December. That's when we got on the ship.

MK: What was it like being at the immigration station before you folks left?

EK: Just like jail. (Laughs) You're under guard right?

MK: I was wondering too what it was like. It was the holidays yeah?

EK: Yes. We all had name tags. But, on the 27th you don't know where you're going. They don't tell you. Then you arrive in San Francisco New Year's Day. Then, you have to transfer to another ferry boat to go to Oakland. (Arrive at) Oakland, you see all the old trains, Santa Fe trains waiting for you.

But, this much I should say, the Red Cross was on the boat. We (did not) have warm clothing. They gave us (girls)—it was just unlined overcoats. Everybody I think had red overcoats with huge pocket. Then before you board the train (the Red Cross) were out there with hot chocolate and donuts. Till today, I always (try to) donate to the Red Cross. Even during wartime. We're Japanese, but yet, they (took care of us). I still remember.

MK: How was your mother taking all this? You know you look at her face or how was she?

EK: She went through a lot. Really a lot. Not only us but she had my grandparents too. They're old too. My grandmother had osteoporosis. She used to walk with her hands on her knees.

WN: I guess you must have been doing a lot of walking at that time too.

EK: Yes.

MK: Your mom was sort of helping not only the kids but . . .

EK: Grandparents.

MK: Grandparents. How were you managing at that time? How were you doing?

EK: Actually, they wanted to leave me. They were going to leave me back with my grandparents. But [grandparents] insisted they don't want to stay back. We were going and they want to go too. Otherwise, I was going to be left back with them.

WN: So instead of leaving you and the grandparents, they took all of you folks. I see.

MK: Did you have any say in the matter?

EK: No. No.

(Laughter)

I was only thirteen.

MK: Yeah, yeah. What was it like when you first saw your father on the ship?

EK: (We were in tears.)

MK: You spoke about being on the *Lurline*, what was that ship ride like?

EK: I couldn't eat for the five days. Apple or grapes I ate. I just kept on throwing up. So sick. Then those days being wartime, they had mines buried (at sea) so they had to have drills. You have to run up to the top of the ship with life jacket on. And they (would) come and check the rooms (to see) that everybody is out. I'm so weak I couldn't, I was actually on the second deck. My father covered me with the blanket, I stayed flat. When we arrived there I just barely walked because five days I haven't eaten at all. Just little sip of grapes or apple.

WN: So your father would actually hide you under the blankets.

EK: Yes, blanket. Flatten me.

MK: When you folks were in the ship, were you folks allowed to stay as a family?

EK: Yes.

MK: In one part?

EK: Actually, they had two rooms because my grandparents and us.

MK: When you folks were on the *Lurline* were there guards present or what was it like?

EK: Yes, guards. Yes.

(WN coughs and leaves the room.)

MK: When you arrived in San Francisco you took another boat to go to Oakland.

EK: Oakland.

MK: And from Oakland you were on the train.

EK: On the train. We didn't know where we were going. During the day the (window) shade is up, you can see (outside). Evening (was) blackout so you have to close the shade. Every train there's an MP with gun. That's right where the toilet (was) too. Then, on the train I guess because it's a big crowd they cannot prepare (food). There was one train where they had the meals that you take turns and go and eat. Every day was roast turkey. Some people got sick. The runs and stuff. I guess something wasn't right. But I guess it was easier for them just to roast it. I counted we were on the (beginning) part (of the train and I counted) we had about twenty-two train [cars].

During the day there were kids that would come by. You have to stop at the certain place because you use the same track, so other trains would come. These little boys—looks like Mexican kids—would come (close) by so my dad would give them money and say, "You want to run and get us ice cream?" Buy ice cream for us. So they run and get ice cream for us. Here the train is starting to go and the boy is running to bring us the ice cream. I still remember that.

(WN returns to the room.)

MK: When they're on the train, her dad gave some money to some kids outside to go get some ice cream. Did they get back to you in time?

EK: They were running because the train started going slowly.

WN: So even with the cold weather you wanted ice cream?

EK: Ice cream. (WN laughs.)

MK: And Mrs. Kirito mentioned that all during the train ride they were served roast turkey and people were getting sick. My goodness. What were the conditions like? You had to go to separate car to get your meals. You were saying people were getting sick. Shades were down.

EK: Nighttime. During the day it's okay. And then no beds. You're sitting down right through. So train car by train car, go and eat, take turns.

MK: How were your grandparents on the train?

EK: It was hard, but had to.

MK: Finally when you arrived in Jerome, that was January 5, [19]43 I think yeah. What were your first impressions of Jerome?

EK: It was about nine o'clock in the evening and then all army trucks. We have to get on army trucks and those were not trucks with seats. Just benches on the side. I guess they knew they were going to take us. They drop us without baggage in the blocks. Then everybody has to go hunt. All the baggages are mixed up. Hunt for your baggage and then you go to your assigned quarters. We had two rooms because my grandparents. Then it's so cold, but we were lucky because earlier some Mainland [Japanese American] people already in the camp, so they had some firewood—chopped. My father would go and get (some firewood) and start the (stove). He was helping some other reverend's wife and (family). It was all army cot (and army) blankets. (The) barracks (walls were) thin. It's just tar paper on a single wood.

MK: Again I'm wondering, how were your parents reacting to all this?

EK: Well, we just have to face it. We can't do anything. We didn't know what's going to happen.

MK: Once you folks kind of settled in, what was your daily life like? What did you do every day?

EK: Well, they had schools. So I attended school. Weekends—(Hawai‘i boys from) Camp Shelby, boys from Mississippi heard about the island people so they used to come busloads on the weekends. That’s when we saw boys—family friends that we knew—and some people we don’t even know but they tagged along so. . . .

My mother used to work at the mess hall so whatever extra cabbage or something she used to bring home and make *tsukemono*. My father ordered rice and *shōyu* from Colorado, so he can make sukiyaki for the boys. My mother made *musubi* (and *tsukemono*) so when they go home [to Camp Shelby], they can take it back and eat with their friends, because they missed their rice. Those days rations so we don’t have candy. They used to bring us a whole carton—we used to treasure just one lollipop. But you know, you cannot buy candy, sugar was rationed for one teaspoon per person for breakfast, so lucky my mom took my grandparents plantation—that can, the *bentō*, the double deck.

MK: The *kaukau tin*.

EK: Yes. She used to take that to get the cereal and sugar. She used to accumulate it for the family. My sisters were young so they (did not) want to get up to go (for breakfast). So, my mom would accumulate [sugar] in the bottle and that’s what she used to use for the sukiyaki for the boys at first.

MK: You mentioned too that your grandparents, they continued the tradition of *mochitsuki*.

EK: *Mochi*, yes. So my father would (order) *mochi* rice and he went out in the forest and got a huge trunk. Dug it out. Then it just happened the [Camp Shelby] boys were over at that time so, [they] were pounding the *mochi*. My grandfather—used to say, “You have to eat—your age-amount.”

(Laughter)

WN: So you had to eat thirteen? (Laughs)

EK: *Mochi*. Yes. My grandmother before we even went, she used to make *natto*. She used to raise soybeans a lot. You see, they were healthy. They were ninety-five and ninety-six when they passed away. Just one month—twenty days apart. My father would order meat for them, you go to their house and it was rotten. They’ll eat fish or pork and stuff. They have bananas—tree ripe, they have it hanging in their extra room and you just pick it. Sweet potato. Soybeans. They used to eat all those things. And fish, they would eat. But meat, they hardly ate, so we had to stop the meat market delivering meat to them. They ate a lot of *natto*; the *natto*, she used to salt it a little and dry it and eat it like peanuts.

MK: Their diet kept them healthy.

EK: Yes.

MK: So like in camp, how was the food for you folks and for your grandparents?

EK: Well you can tell we just have to eat what they prepare.

MK: What kinds of things generally did you folks get served?

EK: The food was pretty good and then they had bakers. The *kibeis* actually were—some of them—bakers, so they used to bake dessert. But we ate *ochazuke* in those cups—the thick kind of coffee mugs—put rice in there and just plain cold ice water and made do *ochazuke* with that. (EK and MK laugh.) The cup is so heavy and thick.

But, funny thing is, every Sunday winter or summer, we got ice cream. Those ice cream were like sandwich but all—wrapped in paper only. So you have to eat it fast. We used to stand by the stove and eat that ice cream. (MK and EK laugh.) Somehow they gave us ice cream. The colored people used to deliver the ice and stuff.

Those colored people, my father asked them to buy a couple of chickens, so my father fenced up the back of the barrack and then raised a couple of chickens, so when the soldiers come my grandfather would slaughter them and (prepare) chicken (sukiyaki) for them.

MK: How about planting things? Did your father or grandfather plant?

EK: You cannot plant. It was all sand.

MK: But they had chickens.

EK: Yes, a couple of chickens in the back. A lot of bread. We were able to get a lot of bread. Extra bread.

MK: You mentioned that your father was able to order rice?

EK: Colorado rice and *shōyu*.

MK: For things for the family, say like clothing or shoes. . . .

EK: Yes at that the canteen store. Call it the canteen.

MK: At that time at Jerome, were your parents working in the camp?

EK: Yes, my father was a boiler. Those days for heater, they have coal. He has to burn that. It can last long constantly burning so everybody has hot water for shower. My mom used to work in the kitchen. Sixteen dollars a month. Doctors were nineteen dollars a month. Dentists, doctors, nineteen. Fortunately my mother had a friend from Kaua'i, a young boy, he was a dentist. He took care of us at weekends.

MK: So he took care of any dental problems.

EK: Yes, while we're there.

MK: How about medical problems?

EK: Well, medical they had doctors, because there were doctors relocated in the camp too.

WN: So the doctors were Japanese also?

EK: Yes.

MK: You mentioned there was some people from the Mainland. I guess we call them *kotonks* yeah? What were your relationships with *kotonk* classmates?

EK: At first it was kind of hard, but then later on it was okay. We got along.

MK: You said at first it was kind of hard, what was hard?

EK: Well, you know they don't understand us.

(Laughter)

A lot of pidgin. You forget pidgin or Hawaiian comes out. "*Pau*" and all that stuff. So, they kind of frown at you.

(Laughter)

WN: Could you understand them?

- EK: Yes, we can understand them because it's regular fluent English. When you're in school then you try to speak nicely but among friends, the pidgin comes out or part Hawaiian comes out.
- MK: What was it like in the schools? You were eighth grade when you left, so you continued eighth grade?
- EK: Continued. Yes.
- MK: What was the level of teaching? Harder? Easier?
- EK: It was all right.
- MK: Who were the teachers?
- EK: *Haole*. There was one Japanese. My music teacher was Japanese. One of the *haole* English teacher after we came back to Hawai'i, she taught at Hilo High School. She moved to Hawai'i and taught at Hilo High School. Grace Dilday. She came to Hawai'i.
- WN: This is from Jerome to—she went to Hilo?
- EK: Yes.
- WN: Wow. Do you remember her name?
- EK: Miss Dilday.
- MK: When you weren't in school, what were you doing?
- EK: Well actually, nothing much. They had baseball, basketball there. The *kibeis* in the evenings—we didn't know what was a firefly—they would take us to a kind of bushy place and there was a firefly. With a net they showed us what was firefly.
- MK: So how far could you go outside?
- EK: We cannot go outside the camp but within the camp we can go anywhere in the camp. Some areas they have vegetables growing for the camp. They have a lot trees—forest. But there's snakes. There's lot of little turtles just roaming around.
- WN: Was there like a river nearby?
- EK: No river nearby but I guess the soil is damp, that's why.
- MK: You mentioned snakes. You didn't have snakes in Hawai'i.
- EK: I know. My two brothers had green snakes—in fact I don't know where the pictures are—around their neck. Green grass snake around their neck. All green.
- WN: You mean alive?
- EK: Alive. Yes. Arizona was the rattlesnake. Because we used to go to the Indian reservation and you can hear the rattle. We had to be careful.
- MK: While you folks were at Jerome you were just confined to the camp?
- EK: Camp. Mm-hmm. But they had a office there and I used to work part time. Seven dollars a month as a receptionist. (Chuckles)
- MK: This was at Jerome?

- EK: Jerome. And then I had the privilege of getting a day's pass with my mom. One day we went to Little Rock— that's the day one war ended. Mr. Kirby, an administrator. When he has elderly people, in Japanese he cannot communicate so he would call me and ask me to interpret for him. Every time he does that he has a fruit, he gives me an apple or something. (Laughs) Seven dollars a month I worked part time.
- MK: While you were in Jerome, how conscious were you of being held in an area like fences, guards?
- EK: It was huge, that's why you don't feel it. Guards will be just by the entrance of the camp. Not all over. And it's a huge camp. Like a military camp. Nothing but barracks. So yes, the camp is huge.
- WN: Within the confines of the camp, there was a forest . . .
- EK: Forest.
- WN: . . . and that's where you had the turtles and snakes.
- EK: Turtles, yes. And all the wood they would go and cut it (for firewood). In fact, my father would—when you get up we didn't know icicles in the morning hanging. The walkway they had it rounded like so we don't know it was iced. My father ended up making *geta* for me, and put nails under so when we walk on it we don't slip because the bathroom and the shower room is far. You have to walk. Then my grandparents, they cannot go out so we had chamber pot for them to make *shishi* and my job was to go and empty it out.
- MK: Yeah.
- EK: And dishes—whatever they ate—I had to go out to the laundry room and wash the dishes and come back. In fact, one day I had the dishes and I was walking and I slipped with the dishes. Lucky it wasn't with the chamber pot with all the *shishi*. This man—he's a *kotonk* old man, he was the cook at mess hall—he saw me. He comes and helped me. He had the black boots on him, tried to help me. He falls down too. Funny but that's the ice. Really ice. Wintertime over the shoes we would wear another, "galoshes" they called.
- WN: So your father made *geta* for you that had nails underneath, so like spikes.
- EK: Spikes.
- WN: Oh, so that you'd have better grip.
- EK: Grip, yes.
- WN: On the ice. I see. And you mentioned the dishes.
- EK: Dishes.
- WN: This is when you ate in your barracks? Is that it?
- EK: Yes. Whatever we had. My mom took some few things and you can borrow some dishes from the camp. Because they're so old. So, with the bucket I would go to the laundry room and do the dishes. The laundry room was shared too and you have your things soaked. I tell you, you hang your things soaked overnight there, all black insect, crickets. Full of crickets in there.
- MK: Just a totally different environment yeah?
- EK: Yes. And shower, after you shower you have your washcloth coming back all frozen stiff by the time you come back to your barracks. That's how cold it is. Your hands cold and the towel wets but you have to bring it home. It gets real stiff.

WN: What about chiggers? Were there chiggers there?

EK: No.

MK: Maybe it depended where you're playing.

WN: People have a lot of chiggers. . . .

EK: Oh, yes.

MK: So when it was really cold at Jerome, it was really . . .

EK: Cold.

MK: Cold. How about times when it got warmer? What was it like?

EK: It wasn't too bad, like Arizona was real bad. But, Arkansas wasn't that bad.

MK: Before we get you to Arizona, I was wondering you know you're like a teenager at Jerome. What did teenagers do at Jerome? Organize activities or just independent activities? What did you guys do?

EK: Everybody independent. Really nothing. The elder ones used to have USO. Like the soldiers used to come and they used to have dancing and stuff, but we were young.

MK: You're too young.

(Laughter)

Then you mentioned like at school you had a music teacher. You had English. So it was all different classes . . .

EK: Classes.

MK: . . . with different teachers?

EK: Teachers. Uh-huh.

MK: Any clubs or anything like that?

EK: No. Well they had boys basketball and stuff. . . .

WN: So you weren't interested in boys at that time.

EK: No. Baseball we used to go and watch baseball.

MK: Oh, okay.

WN: You know you said that you had a job as a part-time receptionist? You remember how you got the job?

EK: I just went to apply. Yes.

MK: So even though you were just a teenager, they would take you to work.

WN: It sounds like a pretty brave thing to do. (EK and WN laugh.) For only thirteen years old. Then you said that Mr. Kirby had to—sometimes spoke to some Japanese?

MK: Yeah, elder Japanese.

- WN: You mean at the camp?
- EK: At the camp. They wanted to get a pass to—one-day pass—to leave the camp.
- WN: So I see. So you were like the interpreter?
- EK: So he asked me to come and interpret for him.
- WN: I see. I see. When they would go for passes, where would they go?
- EK: They go to Little Rock.
- WN: Little Rock.
- MK: Would it be hard to get a pass?
- EK: No, you can. But, see those days the buses when my mom and I got on, we got in the back. It has the bench. The driver yelled at us, “Get off! It’s for the colored only.” Even the fountain was black and white. Drinking fountain and stuff. But the bus, we didn’t know, so we sat together. He said, “Get out.”
- MK: How did people treat you folks? Obviously you look Japanese. You’re out there. How were you folks treated when you went outside camp?
- EK: They’d kind of look at you but it was okay.
- WN: Do you remember what you did at Little Rock with your mother?
- EK: We went shopping, actually. Do a little shopping.
- MK: Other than shopping on the outside—you know going out on one-day pass—how did you folks get your dresses or whatever you needed?
- EK: Oh, it was limited, the canteen store they had. Everything was limited.
- MK: How about ordering through catalogs? You folks did any of that?
- EK: No, we didn’t do it.
- MK: Your family didn’t.
- EK: No.
- MK: On the outside in Hilo, your dad had a very good position yeah? And highly respected. Did he have any kind of leadership position at Jerome?
- EK: No, not really.
- MK: No. Okay. When you folks went to Arizona, how come you folks went?
- EK: Oh, automatically they took us there. We had to go. There was no choice.
- MK: When you compare Jerome with Gila River, what comes to mind?
- EK: Gila River was really hot. Real desert. Arkansas was wet and everything. But, really dry. Just like you see in the movies—Texas—you know all the. . . . (Laughs)
- WN: Tumbleweeds?

EK: Yes. Sagebrush and all the coyotes and jackrabbits and rattlesnake. (WN and EK laugh.)

WN: Sounds like a real different place. Cactus too huh? Cactus.

EK: Oh, got those huge cactus. In fact we stood by those big cactus trees and took pictures.

MK: How did you folks manage with the heat?

EK: I don't know, it was so hot. Over there we had beds. Regular, you know. So, it's so hot you cannot touch it. We used to throw a bucket of water on the wooden floor and let that evaporate, to cool off. If you put a frying pan outside, you can fry an egg.

MK: Goodness. And your father came up with some way to make it cooler? How did he do it?

EK: He built one almost three-fourths the size of this door. I don't know where he got those sheds. The wooden sheds. He put in between and he got those pipes. The plastic pipes. Made holes. I asked him—I don't know where he got it but he got this one motor with a fan. He made it so the water would spray and then the fan would bring the cool air.

Right where we lived was a vacant lot. He never did farming but he planted watermelon, and we had huge crops of watermelon that he had to donate to the mess hall for everybody to eat. Bring the watermelon by the cooler. He will put that where he has that little, just to cool it off a little. It's a cooler, not a refrigerator. He made it so that water would drip.

We used to go down to the Indian reservation and there's a stream over there. Real Indians—they lived in the tepee, and then you see the cowhides being dried, and then with a wagon they go and get the water from the well. Typical Indian. My father befriended them and so we had extra bread all the time from the mess hall so we'll give to them and they're so happy with the bread. They had fig trees so they'll give us figs. But there was a little stream there. It's so hot so my brothers and us we would jump into that stream. But, we didn't know about water moccasins. The snake on the side (of the stream).

But there was plenty of *koi*. The black *koi*. Lots of them in that stream. So my father caught a whole bunch and then before that he made a little pond outside the barracks where the water would drip from the cooler and then make the water drip into the pond. He brought home *koi* and put it in that pond. But to bring the *koi* home it's so heavy because we had to walk through the desert. The Indians loaned my father a horse. And then when people heard about the *koi*, and olden days Japanese people believed when you have high fever, you drink the blood from the *koi*. People used to come and ask for the *koi*.

MK: Your father was a very ingenious man yeah? (EK laughs.) Figuring out how to build things.

EK: I don't even know how but I guess he's one that never do those things (WN chuckles.) but when it gets hot you think of something.

WN: So the dripping from the cool water dripped into—did you have a *tarai*, a tub? Or, he made a pond?

EK: He made a pond.

WN: He made a pond.

EK: Yes. With little rocks. Right outside the barracks. My grandma would sit out there and put little bread for the *koi*. There was a lot of *koi*. You don't have to hook, you just (EK and MK laugh.) stop the irrigation too. So you can just stop it and scoop it. I don't know if they eat it.

- WN: And to go to the Indian reservation, did you have to go outside of the camp?
- EK: No, it's within.
- WN: Oh, still within.
- EK: Yes, it was open so you can walk.
- WN: Wow. Must have been a huge compound.
- EK: Yes. You can just walk. And over there (Arizona) they had an amphitheater, an outside theater. We would (go and see) a movie. Take blankets (on a sloped sandy mountain and) watch movies.
- MK: At Jerome did you have movies shown?
- EK: No.
- MK: No. Nothing.
- EK: Even in Arizona there were a lot of Mainland people there too already. They were kind of established.
- MK: From Jerome, were there people that you knew well that went along to Gila River?
- EK: Yes, because all the people from Hawai'i, all were sent to Jerome.
- MK: At Gila, you were going to school. What was school like for you over there?
- EK: It was okay.
- MK: But you're getting older. You're getting to be an older teenager. How about social activities?
- EK: Nothing. Only the movie theater. Nothing else.
- MK: Your parents, were they still working some way?
- EK: No, no. No work.
- MK: So your mom wasn't working in the mess hall?
- EK: No.
- MK: Father not working in the boiler room?
- EK: No.
- MK: So what did they do every day?
- EK: Nothing. (EK and MK laugh.)
- MK: And your grandparents. They were a little bit older. How were they?
- EK: Okay. They were all right.
- MK: They were all right?
- EK: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: How often did your father go out to the Indians' reservation or Indian area to trade?

EK: Well, once in a while. In fact, we went quite a bit because we want to swim. We didn't know about the snake, water moccasins in the stream.

MK: That's something. When did you folks figure out there were water moccasins in there?

EK: They told us and we saw. They were on the edge of the stream, stream bank, swimming. Lucky we didn't get bit.

MK: Yeah.

(Laughter)

Then, eventually November [19]45, your family was released from Gila. Where did you folks go from Gila?

EK: We were at this one military camp actually for a little while. I think---I forgot but funny I don't remember too well, about two weeks I think. Over there you see a lot of those—what do you call the floating New Year's floats—they have the balloon like. . . .

WN: Oh, hot air balloon.

EK: Yes. We used to see that a lot over there.

WN: Was this at Santa Ana Air Force Base?

EK: Yes.

WN: Santa Ana.

EK: Actually, they kept us there until the boat was ready for us.

MK: Then you came back on the *Shawnee*.

EK: *Shawnee*. That's when about forty local boys—soldiers—came on the same ship with us. They helped us with the baggage and stuff. On the *Shawnee* they asked me to help in the office. I was doing typing in the office and this *haole* man was dictating directly. He's dictating and here I'm typing and manual typewriter right? I still remember it.

(Laughter)

I don't know why he came on the ship but he was dictating to me. But then I got sick too and the boys were helping and coming—get me out of the room and take me out, sit out on the bench. They told me, "Watch the flying fish." A lot of fish flying. They used to drag us out. But they were smart, too. They showed a movie on the boat and the soldiers wanted to bring girls in there. You know. (EK and MK laugh.) But I never went. I was too sick to go. Their plan was to have girls join them in that ship. (MK laughs.) But they had movies on the ship. In fact, one of them name was Aoki. He was assistant to our governor. . . .

WN: Oh, Dan Aoki?

EK: Dan Aoki, yes. Then there was this other, Ben Tashiro. He's a lawyer from Kaua'i.

WN: Right.

EK: Those two, I knew them well. Aoki, I said we're not related but we're Aokis.

- MK: By that time, what were your feelings about returning to Hawai'i? Being released and returning to Hawai'i.
- EK: Yes, we were really happy, but kind of disappointed too. Coming home, nothing in the house. You cannot buy. Empty house, because we rented but those people whatever they put in they took it out with them. Fortunately, this Dr. Yamanuha—I was born in, his Hilo Hospital—he had hospital beds. He gave us hospital beds. We had beds.
- My mom was cooking on the hibachi when we came back, (then April 1st) tidal wave. My mom was still cooking on the hibachi. We were cooking (without a) stove still after the war. We had twenty-five people in the house.
- MK: Oh, they lost their homes or they had to evacuate?
- EK: They had to evacuate because it was dangerous already because nearby homes were already taken down.
- WN: So this is April 1946? The tidal wave.
- EK: April 1st.
- MK: Like you were saying, you folks got your beds from the doctor. Your mom still was cooking on hibachi. Was it because of lack of funds or not having things to buy?
- EK: Not having things to buy. Because, the war, that's why. They weren't making things. I guess more war equipment, yeah. Even car you cannot buy car. My father was renting U-Drive for a while. Then, later on when cars were coming in I know he went to Von Hamm-Young and then he had to give \$500 under the table to get a car.
- MK: Your father, when he came back was he able to again assume his old position with American Savings?
- EK: Yes. But those days he used to go out and do collection. That was in 1947 is when he finally got the car. He had to wait that long.
- MK: So back in the same house but no furnishings. No appliances.
- EK: Nothing.
- MK: The tidal wave. You have twenty-five people in your house. Your father didn't get a car until [19]47 to help with his collections and his work.
- EK: Mm-hmm.
- MK: What was it like for you to return back to Hilo?
- EK: Actually, I didn't want to go back to school. (Chuckles)
- MK: How come?
- EK: Because mid-term---it was January right?
- MK: Yeah.
- EK: We were halfway. You have to join them from wherever they are. Math class and whatever. I hated that because it wasn't from the beginning. So it was kind of hard.
- WN: This is senior year already?

- EK: Yes. Especially social studies and stuff. I use to hate that because you don't know what's going or anything. Math, same thing. They're kind of advanced already.
- MK: How many others among people your age that you knew were in the same situation when you came back?
- EK: I remember I just had another girl. Same.
- MK: So just like two of you.
- EK: Yes, two of us. There were others but they're in all different grades. But she and I were in the same grade.
- WN: Did you have to explain to people why you were gone or anything like that?
- EK: I guess more or less they knew. Then friends too are different already because it was intermediate school (when I left). You're not in contact with them.
- WN: I'm wondering, when you were in Jerome and at Gila River, did you write letters to anybody in Hawai'i?
- EK: Very seldom. I wrote in Jerome. I wrote letters to many soldiers. My father used to tell me they were lonely, and they used to come to camp. Up to fifteen of them I used to write. Then, those days they would censor their mail. So we get this tiny mail.
- WN: They would like cut it out? Cut out words?
- EK: Actually, I don't know if they cut out, but it was made really tiny. It was in a brown paper. And small. Just, about this size.
- WN: The size of the napkin.
- MK: Oh, a little napkin.
- WN: Three-by-five.
- EK: Yes, and they I guess shrank it and they go through all that trouble in doing that but I guess they censored our letters.
- MK: So basically, you lost touch with your friends and classmates for all those years?
- EK: Yes. Only, probably one or two of our neighbors. But that's about it.
- MK: So you weren't looking forward to going back to school?
- EK: I didn't like going back to school.
- WN: I'm wondering, when you came back did you talk differently?
- EK: I don't think so. (WN laughs.) Not too much.
- WN: We were talking to some others who went, and they said that some of them lost their pidgin accent and came back speaking more standard English. But you don't remember that?
- EK: Mainland you wear hats. So when we come back my mom wearing hat everybody just stares at us, but we're so used to it right? We already had it and with a little net in the front.

- MK: Oh? (Laughs)
- EK: Yes. You know, you dress a little differently.
- WN: So you wore that to school?
- EK: No, when you travel. Travel.
- MK: So even the way you dressed in some way kind of changed.
- EK: Changed.
- MK: Did your taste in food or anything else change from the time you were in Hilo to coming back again?
- EK: No.
- MK: No? And having gone through that experience, how did you feel about internment?
- EK: Yes. Really---it was an experience but then why—you know—we had to go. Why are we any different? We're all citizens and. . . .unfair.
- MK: With your parents being nisei, did they ever express thoughts like that too?
- EK: They haven't said but I'm sure they have.
- MK: I know that when you came back you went to—you finished school—you went to Hilo Business College and you worked at American Savings?
- EK: Mm-hmm.
- MK: You got married in 1952. Who did you marry?
- EK: My husband, he's from Pāhala. Keiichi Kirito.
- MK: Keiichi Kirito. How many children and grandchildren do you have now?
- EK: I have two boys and a girl, and I have actually seven grandchildren.
- MK: How much of your wartime experience are they aware of?
- EK: I try to tell them what we went through.
- MK: How do they react when they hear your story?
- EK: I always tell them you cannot waste food. You have to respect. . . . It's so hard to explain to them. Really I say it's just like you're in a military camp. And with guards and everything is limited. And being war days, we had to go without a lot of things. (My granddaughters all made copies of my diary I wrote in our book.)
- WN: When you think back at those days, was it a happy time or sad time? How would you--- what would you say if someone said, "Grandma, during the war were you happy?"
- EK: Yes, I guess so. Wherever you go, you have friends and so you just forget everything else and you have to get along. There's nothing you can do. It was an experience.
- MK: I think we can thank you.

WN: Thank you very much. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Unspoken Memories:

Oral Histories of Hawai‘i Internees at Jerome, Arkansas

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

March 2014